BACKGROUNDER 1-9982
COREY/KUALA

JANUARY 17, 1976

LUMPUR FOCUS -- NEW MALAYSIAN PRIME MINISTER

INTRO:

MALAYSIA HAS A NEW PRIME MINISTER, DATUK HUSSAIN ONN. WITH A LOOK AT HIS BACKGROUND AND WHAT MAY BE EXPECTED OF HIM, HERE IS WAYNE COREY IN KUALA LUMPUR.

TEXT:

MALAYSIA'S THIRD PRIME MINISTER WAS BORN FIFTY-THREE YEARS AGO IN THE SOUTHERN TOWN OF JOHORE BAHRU, WHERE HE WAS ALSO EDUCATED AND RECEIVED EARLY MILITARY TRAINING. HE RECEIVED ADVANCED MILITARY TRAINING IN INDIA, AND WAS STRANDED THERE IN NINETEEN FORTY-TWO WHEN WHAT WAS THEN MALAYA FELL TO JAPANESE FORCES DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR.

DOCTOR HUSSAIN ONN RETURNED TO MALAYA IN NINETEEN FORTY-FIVE, JOINED THE ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICE, AND BECAME INTERESTED IN LAW AND POLITICS. HE WAS ELECTED TO PARLIAMENT IN NINETEEN-SEVENTY, BECAME DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER IN NINETEEN SEVENTY-THREE, AND IS NOW PRIME MINISTER FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF TUN ABDUL RAZAK.

BECAUSE OF THE SECRECY WHICH SURROUNDED THE LONG ILLNESS OF TUN RAZAK WHICH LED TO HIS DEATH, THERE IS INTEREST HERE IN THE HEALTH OF THE NEW PRIME MINISTER. IN FACT, HE IS REPORTED TO HAVE SUFFERED A HEART ATTACK NOT TOO LONG AGO, BUT HE IS SAID TO HAVE RECOVERED COMPLETELY.

MARRIED, WITH FOUR DAUGHTERS AND TWO SONS, DOCTOR HUSSAIN ONN IS DESCRIBED AS ESSENTIALLY SHY, OF RETIRING NATURE, VERY INTELLIGENT AND ALMOST RIGIDLY HONEST. OBSERVERS SAY HE LISTENS TO PEOPLE, BUT ONCE HE HAS MADE A DECISION, HE WILL STICK TO IT STUBBORNLY.

THE NEW MALAYSIAN PRIME MINISTER IS KNOWN TO DISLIKE PERSONAL PUBLICITY. HE HAS BEEN QUOTED AS SAYING PEOPLE CAN BE

TOO EASILY LED INTO WANTING PUBLICITY MORE THAN ACHIEVEMENT. HE HAS ALSO SAID, "IF I AM TRUSTED, ASKED TO SERVE, IF THE COUNTRY WANTS ME, I WILL NOT REFUSE AT WHATEVER COST TO ME, BUT TO SCRAMBLE FOR OFFICE AT WHATEVER COST -- NO!"

ONE OF THE FIRST DECISIONS DOCTOR HUSSAIN ONN MADE AS PRIME MINISTER WAS TO ANNOUNCE THAT HE WILL ATTEND THE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS SUMMIT CONFERENCE TO BE HELD NEXT MONTH IN BALI. POLITICAL OBSERVERS SAY THIS MAY BE AN EARLY INDICATION THAT FOR THE FORSEEABLE FUTURE, AT LEAST, HE WILL FOLLOW THE POLICIES OF HIS PREDECESSOR.

HE IS EXPECTED TO TRY TO IMPLEMENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS BEGUN BY TUN RAZAK, AND ALSO TO SUPPORT THE STRENGTHENING OF THE NATION'S SECURITY FORCES IN VIEW OF THE PERSISTENT COMMUNIST INSURGENC

IT IS NOT YET KNOWN WHETHER DOCTOR HUSSAIN ONN WILL MAKE A MAJOR EFFORT TO CONCILIATE MALAYSIA'S CHINESE POPULATION, WHICH FEELS SOMEWHAT LEFT OUT OF POLITICAL AFFAIRS. THE NEW PRIME MINISTER MAY ALSO BE COMPELLED TO DEVOTE SOME ATTENTION TO OCCASIONAL STUDENT UNREST WHICH HAS BEGUN TO MAKE ITSELF MORE VISIBLE.

MOST OF ALL, POLITICAL OBSERVERS SAY, HE WILL HAVE TO PROVE THAT HE WILL BE A STRONG LEADER. THERE ARE TALENTED AND AMBITIOUS POLITICIANS IN MALAYSIA WHO COULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF WHAT THEY MIGHT SEE AS A POLITICAL VACUUM BY TRYING TO BREAK APART THE RULING UNITED MALAY NATIONAL ORGANIZATION, WHICH HAS BEEN THE TRADITIONAL FOUNDATION OF MALAYSIAN POLITICS.

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